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AUTHOR Takooshian, Harold
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ABSTRACT

Noting that information retrieval in the library is a task that is ubiquitous and easily overlooked in colleges, this paper discusses the importance of possessing effective library research skills. The speaker recounts his experiences with conducting library research as a doctoral student and describes how this problem eventually evolved into a library skills course offered at Fordham University (New York). The course, "Advanced Library Methods," was a free, non-credit experimental course targeted specifically for first-year students interested in social science. Seven students participated in this course, and all indicated that they found the course to be valuable. It is noted that Fordham plans to expand and institutionalize this course in 1992. Concluding the paper are a table listing the seven students' self-reported problems in the library, an annotated list of major sources of access to the social science literature, and instructions for searching the literature. (12 references) (MAB)

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Teaching library skills **

Harold Takooshian
Fordham University

Compare these two students in the library, both beginning a specific topic for their term paper. Ms. Tryhard has no specific search strategy planned in advance, and saunters to the card catalog to begin her topic and see where it leads. Ms. Swift enters the library with a preset search strategy, aiming to cull from the miles of library shelves the most relevant materials in the shortest time.

Sadly, Tryhard represents 99% of our students, who have little or no training in systematic use of the library. Thus, Ms. Tryhard spends exeessive time searching for material, leaving too little time to hurriedly read, integrate and report on it; in the library she often resembles the orb in a pinball machine, darting from one lead to the next, missing important items along the way. In contrast, Ms. Swift is the rare, systematic student with some library training, who goes through some preset series of steps which make her less likely to become distracted, yielding far more information in far less time.

This sad tendency of most students to flounder in the library is both bad news and good. It is bad news in that, in my 17 years of college teaching, I have found that such floundering in the library is a prime source of students' procrastination in preparing their reports, and even academic failure. It is good news in that such library skills can be easily taught and equally easily learned by our students, who likely would welcome the chance to make their library work easier and better. This is especially true in behavioral sciences like psychology, where I can make this statement with little fear of contradiction:

"The library exceeds the laboratory as the primary site for students' psychological research."

While few psychology faculty would challenge this statement, consider these five points: (a) A lab and a statistics course are typically requisite for an undergraduate psychology degree, whereas a library research course is not; in fact, such a course is practically nonexistent (Harris, 1988). (b) Research methods courses rarely mention the library. (c) Virtually 0% of students use a systematic search strategy upon entering the

** In David G. Myers (Chair), *Invited addresses: New fellows of Division 2*, at the annual meeting of the American Psychological Association, San Francisco, August 1991. The presenter thanks Clement Anzul, Edward Bristow, Harris M. Cooper, Raymond McInnis, Zoe Salem, David J. Stang. Particularly thanks to the Faculty Challenge Program of Fordham College at Lincoln Center, for the funds that made possible the experimental course described herein. Address any inquiries to: H. Takooshian, Social Sciences Div., Fordham University, New York NY 10023.

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library (and this seems true of professionals as well). (d) Students can find little published guidance on doing library searches, despite the ubiquity of the task for term papers and theses. (e) Even the best introductory textbooks rarely advise students on this, with two notable exceptions -- in psychology (Banjamin, Nation & Hopkins, 1990) and in sociology (Robertson, 1987). The fine sources available on this emphasize *where* more than *how* to look for materials (e.g. Reed & Baxter, 1983; Li, 1980).

It seems that information retrieval in the library is a task that is ubiquitous, easily overlooked, and (fortunately) easy to address. The remainder of this presentation gives my personal background with this problem of library research, and a proposed solution to it.

In 1974, like other doctoral students, I was spending many hours in the library researching my four second doctoral exam topics. The topic of "the impact of city life on the individual," was particularly distressing, to spend so many hours to find so few relevant articles, so many tangential ones, only to stumble later on an on-target "gem" that for some reason eluded my earlier search. My mentor Stanley Milgram agreed that the new term "urban psychology" had proven ineffective in his own search, largely because it was not yet being used by subject indexers, so he was especially interested in what I found. In fact I spent one solid 50-hour week in our library, perusing every new journal for that year, from A through Z, jotting the many, many on-target articles I had missed in my previous months' searching -- an effective but hopelessly inefficient method of library searching, that convinced me "there must be a better way!" Soon after that, a marvelous researcher David Stang addressed our school's Wednesday colloquium, and I sent him a request for any published guide to help a student find library materials. Within one week arrived one of the most unusual letters I have ever received. David noted it was a good question, he did not know of any printed guide, so he wrote one, and enclosed the thick ms. for my comments! I was both awed and responsive. In fact we organized an APA symposium on information retrieval in Toronto in 1978, and then published our guide (Stang & Takooshian, 1981), which included use of other social science indexes besides *Psychological Abstracts* (see Figure 1). Both David and I discovered that our fairly good library skills increased dramatically once we consciously thought about our search methods. Since then, often with the cooperation of able librarians (Clement Anzul, Ray McInnis, Zoe Salem), I have developed modules to briefly cover library methods in my regular courses in psychology (Takooshian, 1984; Takooshian & Salem, 1985) and in social science (Salem & Takooshian, 1986).

In Spring, 1991, Fordham University agreed to offer a new college course on "Advanced library methods." The free, 0-credit experimental course was targeted specifically for first-year students interested in a social science. It ran for five weeks,

beginning with a 10-step sequence for library research (see Figure 2), followed by a lecture, demonstrations and exercises ending with a project, a 15-item final exam and P/F grade. At semester's end they sent anonymous course evaluations along with a survey directly to the Associate Dean, and participated in a focus session to offer suggestions about the future of the course.

Of 32 students, nine registered for the course, seven attended, and all seven completed it with a P grade. Each was able to pick a topic relevant to papers in another courses the same semester -- "Aspirations of minority students;" "Anxiety during wartime;" "Why women endure abusive relationships;" "Hypnotherapy for teen alcohol;" "Computers in counseling;" "Use of video testimony in child abuse litigation." A pregnant student taking no other course researched "Factors affecting prenatal health."

A glimpse at these students' post-course written and oral comments indicates clear results, despite the small sample size of seven. In Table 1, for example, students were nearly unanimous in noting problems they at first did not realize they had in the library, and that improvement in their library methods was rapid once they were conscious of them. They estimated the course already was useful in their other psychology courses, since these involved term papers. In fact, they suggested the course be redesigned in such a way that it could be required of first year students. It is my hope somehow to objectively assess in two years whether this course has had any discernible impact on the seven students who completed it. Meanwhile, Fordham plans to expand and institutionalize the course beginning in 1992.

To the extent that this experience would be similar at other colleges as well, a few suggestions are offered here on teaching library skills: (a) An instructor can introduce the topic as a session early in his/her regular introductory course. (b) A university administrator might consider developing a course of this sort, as has now been done at Missouri, Fordham, and elsewhere. (c) An introductory textbook publisher or author might consider including a sidebar or, better yet, an appendix guiding students in this ubiquitous, important task.

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Table 1.

Seven students' self-reported problems in the library, on a scale of 0 (not at all) to 4 (very much).

Mean	
3.2	Had **difficulty** finding relevant materials.
3.2	Used no systematic **strategy** to find materials.
3.8	Spent too much **time** to find relevant materials.
3.5	Felt like I **missed** many relevant materials.
3.5	Got **sidetracked** while looking for relevant materials.
3.8	Spent extra time search for items, leaving **less time** later to read items and write a report.

Figure 1.

Some major sources of access to the social science literature.

If you are interested in...	then try...	which includes...
published psychology material	Psychological Abstracts	1927. A comprehensive index of 900 psychology and related scientific journals - indexed monthly, semiannually, and triennially, by author and by subject, and including abstracts. It contains published articles, books and A.P.A. addresses.
published material in education, psychology, and applied social science	Current Index to Journals in Education	1969. A comprehensive index of over 700 journals in education and related fields - indexed monthly, semiannually and annually, by author, by subject, and by journal, and including abstracts.
unpublished research in education, psychology, and applied social science	Resources In Education	1966. A comprehensive index of unpublished material in education and related fields - indexed semiannually by author and subject, and including an abstract for each entry, as well as a copy of the complete report on microfiche.
social science journal materials	Social Science Citation Index	A comprehensive index of 1400 journals from all the social sciences - indexed in April August and December (annual), and arranged by citation (see text), by author, and by subject. No abstracts. All a journal's contents are indexed: articles, editorials, book reviews, letters, and so on.
published sociology material	Sociological Abstracts	1953. A selective index of journals in sociology (but not psychology) - published 5 times a year and annually, and indexed by author, subject and periodical, and including abstracts.
social science research	Social Sciences Index	1907. A selective annual index of 263 leading popular and technical periodicals - arranged by author and subject. No abstracts.
dissertation research	Dissertation Abstracts International	1938. A comprehensive monthly and annual index of doctoral theses from 345 North American universities - indexed by author and subject, and including a long abstract, as well as a complete copy available on microfiche ($5) or bound Xerox ($11).
popular views on the topic	Readers' Guide to Periodical Literature	1890. A selective index of about 150 leading popular periodicals - indexed annually by author and by subject. No abstracts.
recently published books	Books In Print	A definitive annual index of all the books currently available from American publishers - indexed by author, subject, and title.
the most recent articles in behavioral science journals	Current Contents - Social and Behavioral Sciences	A weekly index reprinting the tables of contents of some of 1100 journals in the social sciences, including psychology. The lag time is only 10 days up to 8 weeks.

(Adapted from D. Stang & H. Takooshian, How to use libraries effectively. Washington DC: Pintail Press, 1981.)

Figure 2. **Searching the literature** **

(A) Searching the literature. (B) Analyzing the literature. (C) Writing the report.

1. **Pick a good topic.**
   a. interesting to you.
   b. specific, specific, specific. (Not overwhelming or diffuse)
2. **Pen the topic on a clean sheet of paper.**
   a. Brief (half sentence; two variables)
   b. start generating synonymns ("descriptors").
3. Check some source for **a quick overview** of the topic, either:
   a. an introductory textbook in the field (ask your instructor), or
   b. a library enclopedia for your field.
      (In Psychology: Corsini; In social science: Wolman, Sills).
   c. If this seems useful, photocopy it.
   d. If you are lucky to find a "perfect" article or book, record this.
4. **Consider the indexes** best for your topic. (Stang & Takooshian).
5. **Consult each index.**
   a. Work from most recent annual volume backwards.
   b. Do not go back more than 3-5 years.
   c. Be brief in your work, only **15-30 minutes** this first visit.
6. **Now decide on the topic:** whether to retain, revise, or drop it.
7. Once the topic is firm, consult the same indexes for the last 3-5 years **in more detail:**
   a. work backwards, from most recent to 3 years ago.
   b. use index cards, not sheets of paper.
   c. from each index, systematically record minimum info on 3 lines of the card, for just those articles most relevant.
      1. author. 2 title 3. journal, year, vol., pages.
   c. Be quick. Don't deliberate. Get as many strong titles as possible in a brief time.
   d. If an index notes "see also...", pen this on your initial descriptor card [2b].
8. If you were lucky to find a "perfect" citation [3d], consult this in the most recent Social Science Citation Index
   a. first the "citation" volume (under author and year),
   b. then the "source" volume (under author).
   c. If new SSCI citations sound good, add them to your cards [7c].
9. Once you have an "adequate" number of references, **find the journals/books on the shelf.**
   a. At Fordham, for journals, check journals' call-number at the reference desk, write them on your cards.
   b. For books, check the call-number at the catalog, write them on your cards,
   c. Arrange your cards by call-number, then check the shelves.
   d. For a book, check the books surrounding the one you seek (to find easily other relevant titles).
10. **Check the time.** At this point, you should have spent less than 2-3 hours in the library. If you have spent more than 3 hours, something is wrong. Check what it is.

Congratulations! You have finished the search. Now is the next task of persusing or reading what you have found, so:

** For the Spring 1991 Fordham course in Advanced Library Research. Direct comments to Prof. H. Takooshian, 212-841-5468.